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FOR NEA/ARP AND NEA/PPD

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL PHUM KPAO QA

SUBJECT: QATARI STUDENTS SPEAK OUT ON POTUS SPEECH

KEY POINTS

-- (U) On June 10, Qatar University hosted Ambassador for a discussion with the QU President, students, and faculty on President Obama's June 4 speech in Cairo.

-- (U) The students, who were joined by a group of Egyptian and American journalism students on a summer exchange program, focused on the President's next steps.

-- (U) Many wondered how effective the President would be in implementing his initiatives, and whether or not the President was sincere about his commitment to human rights and democracy promotion.

-- (U) Ambassador, delivering remarks in Arabic and then fielding questions, reinforced the speech's key themes, and to encourage audience members to think about the speech as a "declaration of intent" from which would flow plans and programs to implement the President's vision.

-- (U) Local press coverage of the event was positive.

END KEY POINTS

¶1. (U) Qatar University President Dr. Shaykha al-Misned welcomed Ambassador to an event gathering about 45 students and faculty to discuss President Obama's June 4 speech in Cairo. The event was moderated by American University in Cairo professor Laurence Pintak, and Ambassador delivered short remarks in Arabic reinforcing the President's key themes.

¶2. (U) The Qatari students, who were joined by American and Egyptian journalism students on a summer exchange program, focused their questions on the President's next moves, whether the speech was "only a band-aid to make us feel better for America's support to tyrannical regimes," and how the President could juggle his new foreign policy commitments during a serious financial and economic crisis.

¶3. (U) The American and Egyptian students who asked questions wondered what the President meant by "stopping" Israeli settlements, whether U.S. pressure on Israel might include financial penalties, and whether or not the President would "pull back" from democracy and human rights promotion in the interest of "shared values."

¶4. (U) Ambassador referred to the speech itself to answer questions about the President's intentions, and urged the students to view the speech as a "declaration of intent" meant to present the President's strategic direction, from which would then flow planning and programs to implement that vision. Ambassador also asked them not to interpret every small change in tactics that they may see over the next several months as a shift in strategy.

¶5. (U) Coverage of the event in Arabic-language dailies was positive. Under the headline, "Obama's Speech is a New Strategic Beginning", local daily "Al Watan" wrote that Ambassador explained that U.S. strategy toward the Muslim world is based on dialogue.

LEBARON